



Outsourcing Housekeeping: An insight into two cleaning companies, SOL and N-Clean, in Helsinki, Finland

Samra Hussain

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Author(s) Samra Fazal Hussain	
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<p>The purpose of the author was to find to get an insight into the cleaning companies, in Helsinki, Finland, which the hotel industry is using as an external supplier for their housekeeping department. The author has looked into the cleaning companies training process for the cleaning staff, employee demographics, quality control and process of handling complaints. The advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing housekeeping in the hotel sector are also investigated.</p> <p>The research method used in this thesis was qualitative research method, and the method of collecting data was conducted by carrying out interviews. Two different cleaning companies and two different hotels were a part of this thesis. The managers of the hotels and the cleaning companies were interviewed, along with the supervisors and cleaning staff members of the cleaning companies to collect the data.</p> <p>The findings showed that the trend of outsourcing housekeeping in the hotel sector is increasingly becoming common. Hotels are opting for outsourcing their housekeeping for several different reasons, including but not limited to; low cost, professional personnel, less staff members to manage, resulting in less responsibilities for the managers. The findings also indicated that majority of the cleaning staff hired by the cleaning company are non-Finnish citizens, all of which have different levels of education and experience. This poses problems when it comes to communication and understanding of the tasks, as many foreign cleaning staff barely have any Finnish or English speaking skills.</p> <p>Training programs are offered by both cleaning companies, for which both have slight differences, but mainly cover the same areas. There is definitely room for improvement, which could lead to a better understanding of the task for the newly hired staff members. The importance of the quality of the services provided by the cleaning companies is also discussed, highlighting the fact that nowadays this aspect has major effects on hotel's revenue, as the guests leave their reviews of the hotel on social media during their stay. This has a direct affect on the prospect guests who read those reviews before making their bookings. There are both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to outsourcing the hotel's housekeeping, however the advantages may outweigh the disadvantages which may be the reason the hotels are inclined towards outsourcing. The cleaning companies have established a good standard of cleaning services, which makes it easier for the hotels to outsource their housekeeping to them.</p>	
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1 Introduction

Housekeeping is an integral part of hotels and is fundamental to the reputation of the business. Putting together a reliable team for the housekeeping department is labor intensive and requires a lot of time and effort and usually the entire human resources team is required to handle their needs. One alternative that is being used is by using an external service provider to supply the staff needed for housekeeping department. Outsourcing is not a recent phenomenon for hotels, but it has become a great outlet for the hotel industry recently. One must outweigh the benefits and drawbacks before outsourcing such a core department to an external service provider. More and more hotels in Helsinki are outsourcing their housekeeping department, thus one could assume that it is proving to be beneficial for the hotels. Each hotel may have their own reasons and advantages for outsourcing their housekeeping department.

The author had the opportunity to do an internship at a hotel as a receptionist, where the author was also given the chance to do some shifts with the housekeeping staff to get a better insight into it. During that period, a few things caught the attention of the author regarding the way the cleaning and housekeeping was being done in the hotel. The author gained interest in the phenomenon of outsourcing housekeeping and was interested to find out more about the operations of the cleaning companies. As the cleaning companies have recently had the opportunity to make way into the hospitality market by fully taking control of the outsourced operations or by providing staff to. How the cleaning companies train their staff to be able to take care of such an integral department of the hotels was a concern of the author.

It is significant to find out how the cleaning companies are responding to the increase in demand for their services in hotels, some being big chain hotels and others less known hotels. They are experiencing a change in their processes and reputation as they get new contracts with bigger companies requiring their services. Recruiting, training and maintaining the service quality has become a challenge for the cleaning companies. Unless the cleaning companies take this new role of housekeeping seriously, their reputation could be harmed in the long run. The demographics are of an interest as well because the background and nature of the employees shapes the training program. If highly skilled workers are hired, a less thorough approach would be used, whereas if the workers lack experience and knowledge in this field, the training would have to involve basics as well as professional skills in order to meet the requirements of big brand hotels.

The aim of this thesis was to get an insight into two cleaning companies, SOL and N-Clean, which the hotel industry is using as an external supplier for their housekeeping department. The author wanted to include hotels' perspective in this thesis as well, mainly those which were using the same cleaning companies as the ones selected for this research. Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga was selected because their housekeeping department was outsourced to N-Clean, similarly, Original Sokos Hotel Albert was selected because their housekeeping department was managed by SOL.

The author wanted to get an insight into two different cleaning companies (SOL and N-Clean), which would help the author get a better understanding of the outsourced housekeeping from two different perspectives. SOL was selected in this research due to its good reputation among the cleaning industry and N-Clean was selected due to the fact that they provide one of the lowest prices for their cleaning services. This was to be done by looking into several different aspects of the cleaning companies, which brings us to the objectives of this thesis; the primary objective of this thesis was to find out about the training program and motivation of the housekeeping department and how the cleaning companies (SOL and N-Clean) ensure to deliver good and hygienic services. Another objective was to find out the hotel's perspective on outsourcing their housekeeping department. The third objective was to find out the demographics and employment criteria of the cleaning company's staff, which will provide a better understanding of the cleaning company's environment and processes. The fourth objective is to find out the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing housekeeping services in the hotel industry based on the information gathered from the interviews from both the cleaning companies and hotels.

Theoretical framework is used to familiarize the reader with adequate knowledge on the topic before reading the thesis. In the theoretical framework the reader can find background information on housekeeping, outsourcing housekeeping, training and motivation, health concerns with housekeeping, quality service and quality control, supervising and handling complaints. The third chapter of methodology describes the research and data collection method and why particularly these methods are chosen for this thesis. Furthermore in the methodology chapter the reader can find details about the formulation of the interview questions. Validity of the study is also discussed in this chapter.

The findings are presented in the fourth chapter, where the interviewees are also introduced to the reader. Then the interviews conducted for the data collection are analyzed by common themes. The reader will also find valuable data of the cleaning company's employee's demographics as well as employment criteria, which is also compared and analyzed. The perspectives of the hotel's managers are reported in this chapter. The limitations of the study can also be found in this chapter. The Interview questions can be found in appendix 1, 2, 3, 4.

The findings are discussed in the fifth chapter. The discussion includes an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing housekeeping, which the author concludes from the theory of the literature used and the interviews conducted. This chapter also includes some recommendations for the cleaning companies who provide their services to hotels, as well as the need for further studies is emphasized. In the last chapter a conclusion will be presented for the reader along with the author's personal reflection.

1.1 Purpose of the thesis and study questions

The purpose of this thesis was to get an insight into the cleaning companies which the hotel industry is using as an external supplier for their housekeeping department. The aim was to find out how the cleaning companies are responding to the increased demand of their services required by the hotel industry.

Specifically the author aimed to answer the following questions;

1. Has there been an increase in the outsourcing of housekeeping department in hotels?
2. What is the process and importance of training for the cleaning staff in cleaning companies?
3. Is the outsourced housekeeping staff able to deliver consistency in quality?
4. What are the employment criteria for the cleaning staff of the cleaning companies?
5. What are the demographics of the cleaning staff in the cleaning companies?
6. How are complaints handled by the cleaning companies?

2 Defining concepts related to housekeeping

This theoretical framework part will address what housekeeping and outsourcing is along with other important elements related to outsourced housekeeping,

2.1 Housekeeping

There are numerous definitions of the word housekeeping, according to Malik, 2010, the word housekeeping is broken down into two separate words; house and keeping. The word house is described as a building for people to live in, and the word keeping is described as to continue to stay or remain in a specific situation, or to do something frequently or repeatedly. Thus the word housekeeping means keeping a house in a specific state frequently or repeatedly in order to keep the guest comfortable. According to Raghubalan (2015,17) one possible definition of housekeeping could be “provision of a clean, comfortable, safe and aesthetically appealing environment.” Another definition the author has provided for housekeeping is “an operational department in a hotel which is responsible for cleaning, maintenance, aesthetic, upkeep of rooms, public areas, back areas and the surroundings”.

Housekeeping is a very important department of any hotel, as it contributes to the overall reputation of the hotel. This department is responsible for the cleaning of all areas of the hotel, however it does depend on their contract with cleaning company which areas will be covered. For instance housekeeping department may be responsible for the lobby area, front office area, guest rooms and washrooms, the pool, the gym, and the meeting rooms, depending on what services the hotels have to provide for their guests. It is their duty to make sure that hotel looks clean and tidy, so the guests could have a remarkable stay not only in their personal room but in the entire hotel. Raghubalan (2015,17) mentions that the work done by the housekeeping staff in order to provide an ideal room for the guest has a direct effect on the guest’s experience in the hotel.

According to Nitschke and Frye (2008:3), housekeeping department in the hotel industry has the largest number of employees, as the tasks carried out by the housekeeping staffs are critical for the daily operations in the hotel to run smoothly. Some of the responsibilities of the housekeeping department are described by Raghubalan (2015: 18), as: “to ensure a high standard of cleanliness and general upkeep in all areas for which the department is responsible, ensure that the quality of the work is maintained as at the onset of the business, ensure training, control and supervision of all staff attached to the depart-

ment, establish a good working relationship with other departments and to ensure that the safety and security regulations are made known to all staff of the department". Depending on the area that needs to be cleaned, some responsibilities of the housekeeping department may differ from one contract to the other.

2.2 Changing trends in outsourced housekeeping

Björn Axelsson & Finn Wynstra (2002,9) define the word service as " a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities". Outsourcing is defined by Mol (2007,5) as "the procurement of goods and services from external suppliers". When a company wants to complete one of their services using an external supplier, instead of their internal source, they transfer that specific portion of work to the external supplier, so the company itself is no longer in charge of it. There are several reasons why any company would consider this, one of the major reasons being the cost effectiveness. The goods or services can be more affordable for the company if they purchase it externally than it is to provide the goods or services internally. For this purpose, an individual or a company can be hired either domestically or internationally to complete the service.

Mol (2007), states that companies are restructuring their business by outsourcing some of their services, which in turn gives their business a boost. Outsourcing has become more common in all sized companies, as it is increasingly becoming affordable and at the same time beneficial for the companies. Professional housekeeping services are highly desired in the hotel industry, as well as other industries such as hospitals, offices, and cruises. As these industries are increasingly opting for outsourcing their services, this is causing a uproar in the market of contract outsource entrepreneurship. Several different kinds of outsourcing contracts can be found in hotel housekeeping. For example, complete cleaning programs, regular selected cleaning, the entire housekeeping operations and consultancy services (Raghubalan, 2015: 18, 118).

There has been an increase in the trend of outsourcing in the housekeeping department. There are mainly two reasons for the hotels to outsource their housekeeping department; it is cost efficient, and the issues related to unionization are no longer there. One great reason for outsourcing housekeeping is due to the fact that they can use external professional services who specialize in this field, and provide well-trained personnel and professional equipment. Not only investment in the equipment used for housekeeping, but also training is required to use special machinery. Thus, by outsourcing this service, the need for special training and safety hazards is no longer present (Raghubalan, 2015,766). The

understood reason for outsourcing so far leads to core business among other reasons. Hotels are outsourcing this department so they can concentrate on core issues of their hotels, while knowing that the company and staff they have hired for outsourcing is responsible and are taking good care of their department.

2.3 Training and motivating employees

(Ninemeier and Kavanaugh 2013,103) defines training as “Any activity that results in learning”. He also defines learning as something that helps one gain more knowledge and polish one’s existing skills by doing professional study on the topic or by gaining more experience in the field. During training, areas of details are highlighted regarding the employee's role, which may not be a part of orientation. Often orientation is kept brief with an overview of the basic knowledge of the company and the employee's position, thus details must be covered during training sessions which create a better understanding for the employee of their role.

According to Casado (2012, 169, 172) “The hospitality industry is notorious for attracting large number of unskilled workers”. The author further adds to this, that it is not uncommon to find employees in the housekeeping department with lower socioeconomic background, who don't have the basic education in order to read and write. Not only that, but they often lack basic English/national language speaking skills. Staff whose educational background may be lower would require a lot of training and that is why they have different training programs and methods for housekeeping staff. For employees with this kind of a background, training becomes compulsory. Casado also mentioned four different areas in housekeeping where training is most required including but not limited to; technical skills, employee attitude, personal development and knowledge of the property. Hotel housekeeping staff is trained to work alone and also handle work related equipment's by themselves, which requires proper training in order to make sure that the employee is comfortable using the equipment on their own.

Proper training assists the employee in performing their tasks to the best of their potential. Training should be focused on the trainees’ interest and needs, for which a proper assessment is necessary. There are different learning styles which help employees to complete their training effectively. Different personalities learn in different ways, which creates a need for specific learning styles. Kavanaugh (2013,103-5) mentions that visual learners learn best by seeing, auditory learners learn best by hearing, and tactile learners learn best by doing. In order to cover all these different ways of learning and providing a learn-

ing experience which would benefit all the trainees, different methods of teaching should be used. According to Raghubalan 2015 there are different kinds of methods that are used for hospitality training, including demonstration, case study, lectures, video presentations and self-training.

Training is not only valuable for newly hired housekeeping staff; it is also very beneficial and important for existing staff members who want to develop their skills or for those who may be interested in a promotion in the same company. Often there may be a problem in the way the employee works or the process they follow, which would require them to be trained further. Raghubalan (2015, 80) mentioned different types of training types which include induction training, refresher training, remedial training, cross training, on the job training, simulation training and off the job training. Some of these methods are used for newly hired staff whereas some are useful for existing staff members.

According to Raghubalan (2015,80) training benefits all employees including new employees so they are able to learn in comfortable surroundings. Training allows the housekeeping staff to understand quality standards required from their work and it also helps them to improve their performance at work. Kavanaugh (2013,111) states that training helps employees to gain more self-confidence and it makes it less stressful for them to work in any given situation. This ensures that they are able to deliver high quality service. It is crucial for the cleaning companies to fulfil their promises made with the hotels, as well as to reach their own and the hotel's goals towards cleaning service for their guests.

Nitschke and Frye (2008,153) described motivation as “the art of stimulating a person's interests in a particular job, project, or subject to the extent that the individual is challenged to be continually attentive, observant, concerned, and committed”. This highlights the importance of one's interest in their job, as that is the main source of motivation, without it one would find it very difficult to find the motivation in order to do perform better. The authors explained motivation as an outcome of their job satisfaction and it also provides employees with the feeling that they are a valued part of the work community. Raghubalan (2015,90) states that motivation is the result of fulfilling the employee's basic needs regarding their job security and recognition in department. All the factors mentioned in the former; interest in one's job, job satisfaction, and fulfilment of basic needs contribute to the development of motivation.

Various methods of motivation can be found, Raghubalan (2015,90) describes methods of motivation as “financial incentives, participation, delegating responsibilities, performance

appraisal and employee welfare". For example these methods can be applied by giving promotions, bonuses, recognitions, etc. When employees are empowered or given the opportunity to make decisions regarding their work, it encourages them to perform better at their tasks. As everyone has different reasons for being motivated, one has to figure out what the employees personal reasons for motivation are and to combine them with the organisation's vision and goal (Bruce, 2011,3, 10). Nitschke and Frye (2008,153) have also highlighted some methods of motivation, such as; training, communicating, and incentives programs. Communication is an aspect that should not be overlooked. If the supervisor/manager communicates with the employee regarding their personal goals and understands their concerns, it can help the supervisor/manager to create such atmosphere which would foster motivation in the employee.

According to Kavanaugh (2013,283) motivation is found from one's inner self, no external source can force one to become motivated. Bruce (2011,1) mentions that a person can only impact what another person is motivated for, but cannot force one another to become motivated. The employee needs to find motivation from within them when undertaking the tasks given to them. The employer can also create an environment which the employee is comfortable in and is capable of finding inner motivation. Casado (2012,172) brings our attention to the fact that the employee's basic needs to be met, before the employee can begin to feel motivation towards productivity in their work. It is only natural for a person to be motivated in something that is in their best interest. Companies should create an environment that encourages the employees towards professional growth and personal development, which would in turn facilitate motivation in their work.

2.4 Cleaning and hygiene

According to Raghubalan (2015,765-772) the hotel housekeeping department is changing rapidly. Compared to few years back when only cleaning the premises was the main goal, nowadays taking care of the hygiene aspect is also essential. Eco friendly amenities, products and processes are also increasing awareness in hospitality industry for the cleaning sector. It is not only important to focus on the cleanliness of the hotel, but also personal cleanliness and hygiene of the cleaning staff is necessary. A high standard of hygiene must be kept by the housekeeping staff, as it has effects on the overall hygiene level of the hotel. Raghubalan (2015, 35) explains in detail what is included in good personal hygiene, which includes but is not limited to; cleanliness of the entire body, tidiness and good appearance of clothes and footwear.

Health issues in the hospitality industry seek a great attention towards fighting bacteria and microorganisms which are present in all areas of the hotel, especially the guestrooms, that may become the cause of contamination for the hotel's guests and also the hotel's staff members. Not only the housekeeping staff but also the hotel's managers need to have a good understanding of the different ways microorganisms can spread, and it should be a part of housekeeping staff's educational/training program. It is as important for the housekeeping staff to work in a safe atmosphere with safe chemicals, which are also safe for the guests. The reason hygiene is such a big concern in the hospitality industry and specifically the hotel premises is because it is a public place with people continuously coming in day and night and microorganisms can be easily transferred from one place to another, without anyone realizing it. Thus it is important to take all the necessary precautions to avoid circumstances which result in the illness of the guests or the staff members of the hotel (Casado, 2012, 216).

Nowadays hygiene scores are given in the hospitality industry, for which they must go through regular inspection. Not only the guest rooms are inspected by the overall cleanliness and hygiene of all the areas of the hotel are taken into consideration. For this the housekeeping staff must take care of things like sanitization, air quality, cleaning agents, protection against microbe invasion in the entire premises. There have been some changes in the way the housekeeping cleaning is done, as research continuously provides new and eco-friendly methods of cleaning and equipment which help in controlling dirt and germs more effectively, than other traditional cleaning equipment. For example the use of traditional mops and cloths has been replaced by the product of breakthrough microfiber technology, the microfiber dusters and mops, which provide a better and effective cleaning result.

Awareness is building and more efficient cleaning and eco-friendly products like microfiber are becoming very common. For outdoor cleaning areas, machines are used effectively to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Cleaning companies also understand their responsibilities towards environment; thus they have started to use cotton towels rather than paper towels. Special training is given to the cleaning staff to maintain everyday work according to social responsibility requirements (eco-friendly products and processes). Green chemicals are continuing to grow with improved quality and the prices are also increasing simultaneously (Casado 2012, 237).

It is very important to train the housekeeping staff according to public health standards, first of all this is beneficial for their own health and secondly for those who will be using the areas that were cleaned by them. If the cleaning staff makes sure to wash their hands

after cleaning each room, the spread of microorganisms can be reduced. Casado (2012, 217) explains how viruses can be eliminated by vacuuming carpets daily and also by cleaning surfaces with germicidal containing cloths. Bacteria can spread by cross contamination, for instance the use of the same cleaning cloth to clean the toilet and then the tables in the bedroom can transfer bad microorganisms from one place to another. Thus proper comprehension of optimal cleaning methods is required in order to take the needed precautions.

2.5 Quality service and quality control

According to Martin (2002, 5-6, 48) quality service means to meet the customers external and internal needs, wants and expectations. The author further explains that the perception of quality service varies person to person, for example a first time customer has different expectations from the quality of service compared to a repeated customer. Hunt & Ivergård (2015, 5, 48) explains that there should be a common tool for the service provider and the customer to measure the service quality, so that they are both on the same page. The service provider needs to be able to put themselves in the place of the customer in order to see the customer's perspective on service quality.

According to Olsen & al, (1996, 98) quality planning is essentially designed by the executives of a company, who have a weekly meeting along with the quality control management team. During these meetings "the quality of products and services, guest satisfaction, market growth and development, organizational indicators, profits and competitive status" is discussed. It is beneficial to have a system in place which defines the quality of service requirements and continuously assess that it is being upheld. Grigoroudis and Siskos (2010, 56) state that having a quality management system in place aids "businesses to develop clear requirements, communicate policies and procedures, monitor work performance and improve teamwork". This would enable all the team members to be clear on the goals and visions of the hotel as well as provide them with the motivation to give their best performance in their work.

When the cleaning staff is not educated or trained enough for cleaning hotels with high quality standards, it may lead to dissatisfaction and complaints from the hotel's guests. If the cleaning companies hire staff with fewer skills they would need to have very good training programs for them so that they can understand the quality of service required to maintain the hotel's reputation. Haywood (2001, 74) points out "It would be unrealistic to expect every client to get the same quality of service". For instance if same cleaning staff

provides housekeeping for a 2 star hotel and a 5 star hotel, different levels of service will be expected from the same service provider.

Quality control is described in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as a combination of activities which are performed to guarantee an acceptable quality in products. It is important to mention quality control when writing about housekeeping, as the hotel and the cleaning company both need to be aware of the quality of service provided by the housekeeping staff. They together need to ensure that the standard of the hotel is not affected in a negative way, and before this would happen, it can be addressed and taken care of. This can be done by having some kind of quality control process in place. This would not only guarantee good quality of service, but it would also keep the housekeeping staff more attentive at their work. It is also beneficial to convey the goals and visions of the hotel to the housekeeping staff, as it would help them understand the standard of service required of them.

2.6 Supervising

Kavanaugh (2013,1) refers to the term supervisor as a person who is able to handle skilled and unskilled workers at work. A good supervisor should know what their worker is capable of doing, so that the work can be planned around the worker's skills, which would result in a better outcome. Casado (2012, 28) defines supervisor as someone who has the skills to direct workers in order to make their job easier. Not only that, but the supervisors should act as a role model to their employees, so that they have a positive influence over them. In order to create a positive environment the supervisor must try to establish a good team spirit, in which one member encourages the other and supports one another. Another description of supervisor is provided by Raghubalan (2015, 331) as one who is able to oversee human resources, which is a very important resource of housekeeping department.

According to Raghubalan (2015, 333) some responsibilities of a supervisor include ensuring that the employees follow the given timetable and program, making arrangements for any time off required by the employee, to prepare for the orientation and training of the staff and to make clear to the staff of the scheme of welfare. A supervisor also acts as a messenger between the manager and the staff. This requires the supervisor to have good communication and problem solving skills. Kavanaugh (2013, 17, 38, 41, 50) claims that a supervisor also needs to have technical skills, human relation skills, conceptual skills and

listening, speaking and writing skills. Optimally, all of these skills are required to fulfil the routine tasks of a supervisor.

A supervisor is required to have good conceptual skills because they have to make decisions and solve problems routinely. Supervisors sometimes fail in getting along with their housekeeping staff which may cause low productivity by the staff and can also affect quality standards. Task planning, organizing, coordinating, staffing, directing and controlling and evaluating properly all fall under the responsibility of the supervisor. Along with this, motivating staff and building team trust will result in improving cleaning staff performance and also allow them to manage their own time and bring quality in work.

2.7 Handling complaints

A complaint is described as dissatisfaction to a service or a product which is expressed by someone and it needs to be taken seriously. In the hotel industry, if a customer does not receive the level of service expected, it can often be a cause for the complaint. However, not every unsatisfied customer goes to the extent of making a complaint, research shows that about three quarter of the customers are prepared to do it. Often times a customer may not make a complaint, but the negative experience causes them to not use the same service again and they avoid recommending the service to others (Cook 2012, 9, 13). Based on this, a complaint has negative connotations, so it will stay in a customer's mind as a bad experience, which they will relate to the hotel in overall. In the event that it is resolved with a positive solution for the customer, it will leave the customer feeling satisfied and content with the service.

Cook (2012) mentions a study which came to find out that if the customer's complaint is handled in a thoughtful and timely manner, the customer is likely to use the same service again. This shows the importance of handling complaints carefully and giving them the attention they require. In the hotel industry it is not uncommon for customers to make complaints, be it regarding their rooms, foods, housekeeping or convenience. It is necessary for the staff to be properly equipped with the skills and knowledge for how complaints should be handled, as this has an effect on the customer's future lodging preferences. If the customer's complaint is taken care of in a professional manner, the customer may not share their negative experience of the service with others, rather they are likely to share the positive side of the experience; the well-handled complaint.

The process of handling complaints must be clear to all the staff members. Some complaints can be taken care of by the supervisor while others require the manager's involvement. The receptionist would need to have good customer service skills to begin with, along with patience to carefully listen to the complaint of the customer and see to it accordingly. Cook (2012, 44) cited a study which describes the best way to handle complaints; listening, understanding and acting expeditiously, taking the complaint seriously, acknowledging all the issues, and responding speedily. Complaints regarding housekeeping would need to be communicated to the cleaning company's supervisor or the manager; this is often done by the hotel's manager. At the time when the customer makes a complaint to the receptionist regarding any housekeeping related matter, the issue would need to be resolved promptly and later communicated to the cleaning company.

According to Martin (2002,65-6) There are seven problem solving commands, complaints can be solved successfully by following these steps; firstly by listening to the problem carefully, secondly, understanding the problem and repeating it in front of client to show them that one has understood. Thirdly, apologizing for someone else's mistake, fourthly, acknowledging the client's feelings. Fifthly, asking the client how they would want the issue to be resolved. Sixthly, explaining what kind of actions can be taken to resolve the issue at hand. Lastly, saying "thank you" to the client for bringing the problem into attention. These are the steps which one can undertake in order to keep clients satisfied and loyal when they have complaints and to maintain a good reputation of the hotel.

3 Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is qualitative research and semi-structured interviews were the chosen data collection method. To further support the thesis, books and articles on this topic were used from the database of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences library.

3.1 Qualitative research

According to Gillham (2000, 2), research produces new knowledge, however, a researcher who is open-minded, cannot be sure what the research may lead to. Qualitative research method aims to find answers to a question and it uses predetermined set of procedures to answer it, however the findings are not decided beforehand. This method produces findings which can be applied beyond the scope of the study itself. Qualitative research method often offers a view of the world from the inside out, using the point of view of the participating subjects. This way a better understanding is obtained of social matters and brings focus on processes (Flick and Kardoroff, et al. 2004, 3). A smaller number of participants are often used in qualitative research, as this research method is commonly time consuming. It is possible to learn more from a small number of interviews, as they produce more in depth results, compared to a large scale quantitative research method questionnaires.

Qualitative data is hard to measure, but it can produce valuable findings, which may not be possibly gathered by the more traditional method of quantitative research. Qualitative method was used in this thesis as the aim was not to measure something, rather to gain an understanding of a phenomenon by gathering information from people involved in the researched area.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection method used in the thesis is interview. In this method a set of questions are asked to the interviewee by the author in a controlled situation, however the same questions can be asked by more than one person. The direction of the questions is controlled by the interviewer, to which the interviewee agrees (Keaths, 2000, 1). The interviewer has different options when it comes to deciding how the interview will be conducted, for example interviews may be conducted individually, in groups, face to face, online or via telephone. In this thesis face to face interviews were conducted for most of

the part, where one interview was conducted via email and one via telephone. When interviews are conducted face to face, the interviewer has the opportunity to see the facial expressions of the respondent, as well as get justification for their answers. The interview date and place was set up beforehand with all the interviewees, so everyone was prepared for it in advance.

There are three kinds of structures which can be used when carrying out interviews; structured, semi-structured and unstructured interview. The author decided to use semi-structured interview for this thesis. Roulston (2012, 15) has described semi-structured interviews as a prepared interview guide which consists of a number of questions which are often open-ended. The author also mentions that after each question is asked to the respondent, the interviewer follows up to inquire further details, this results in each interview being different from one another. Keaths (2000, 47) explains that each question leads to a response, which the interviewer has to analyse, in terms of whether the research question has been addressed and if further questions need to be asked. This requires the interviewer to have good listening skills, in order to process what the respondent is saying and simultaneously prepare for the follow up question.

Similarly there are many variations of forming the questions for the interview. The interviewer is in charge of whether the respondent is going to be asked open-ended questions or closed ended. According to Walliman (2011, 97-98), in closed ended questions the respondent must answer using a set of predetermined responses, i.e. yes/no, which can produce quick answers but at the same time can produce limited data. The author further explains that open ended questions give the freedom to the respondent to answer using their own words as well as provide justification for them. Open ended questions were used in the interviews for this thesis, in order to get an in-depth response from the respondents, resulting in rich data, without having to subject them to a short response.

The data was collected by face to face interviewing two cleaning companies, SOL and N-Clean and by email and telephone interviewing two hotels. Managers, supervisors and one cleaning staff member from each cleaning company and hotel managers from two different hotels took part in this study. The author wanted to find out the perspective of the employees working on different positions in these companies, as this provides a better understanding and different perspectives of the topic being researched. Not all questions could have been asked from either one of the professionals alone, as each one of them has specific responsibilities, to which only they could have given an insight into. The hotels managers are interviewed to get an insight into the cleaning companies operation in the hotels as an outsourced housekeeping department. The managers in these cleaning

companies are responsible for cleaning operations and housekeeping related matters, along with other things. The supervisors are mainly responsible for the housekeeping operations and the laundry department. The cleaning staff is responsible for the actual cleaning done at the premises of the hotels.

3.3 Interview Questions

In order to have a clear picture about how SOL and N-Clean clean operate within the company and how they are operating in hotels, different questions are asked according to the interviewee's position/role. The same set of questions were formulated for both SOL and N-Clean cleaning companies and both hotels Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga and Original Sokos Hotel Albert, however, different personnel were asked different set of questions. Both hotel managers were asked the same set of questions, however the manager reached via email was only asked the pre-set questions and no further follow up questions were asked. SOL and N-Clean managers were asked a similar set of questions, both supervisors were asked the same set of questions and both cleaning staff members were asked a similar set of questions. The fact that all these personnel occupy different positions in their respected companies and having different responsibilities required a specific set of questions formulated accordingly.

One hour was reserved for the interview with each interviewee. The interview questions were divided into four parts, as the thesis does not only focus on the manager's point of view, but also the opinions of the supervisors and cleaning staff members. The first set of interview questions (Appendix 1) was for the managers of the SOL and N-Clean cleaning company, which used a semi-structured approach. The questions focused on the outsourcing process, employment criteria, training programs, complaints, and the future goals of the company. The second interview (Appendix 2) was for the supervisors of SOL and N-Clean, which also used a semi structured approach. Supervisors were interviewed while they were on duty. One hour was reserved for the interview. The questions concentrated on the training program, cleaning practices, complaints, and quality control.

The third interview (Appendix 3) was for the SOL and N-Clean cleaning staff members of the housekeeping department, using semi structured approach. In order to have clear view of how both SOL and N-Clean have trained their cleaning staff, the questions were based on their knowledge of cleaning practices, their opinion on training and cleaning processes. The fourth interview (Appendix 4) was for the hotel managers of Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga and Original Sokos Hotel Albert, one of the managers interview was conducted via telephone and the other via email. The interview carried out via telephone

has a semi-structured approach, whereas the interview carried out via email had a structured approach where no follow-up questions were asked. The questions mainly focused on reasons for outsourcing, advantages and disadvantages and quality control.

3.4 Validity

According to Uwe, & al (2004, 185) validation of interview and their sequencing are analyzed with regard to whether the interviewees are talking 'truthfully' or sincerity." In this thesis, to ensure that different perspectives are represented, different personnel related to hotel and housekeeping were interviewed; cleaning company managers and supervisors, cleaning staff members and hotel managers. In order to avoid pre-judgments of what may be important or not important to be discussed, the author had little pre-set questions, so that the respondent's answers could guide the interviewer for more questions which arise from the respondent's answer. The interviewer was cautious not to direct the follow up questions in any specific direction, so the interviewee had the freedom to speak for themselves. The interviews were recorded, apart from one which was conducted via telephone, in order to have the accurate responses saved from the respondents. The recordings were then written down word for word, after which the common themes between all the interviews were compared. During data analysis, the author carried out continuous evaluation of the interpreted data to further ensure the validity of the data.

4 Findings

Two major cleaning companies in Helsinki, Finland, SOL and N-Clean, and two Hotels, Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga and Original Sokos Hotel Albert, were selected for this thesis. Total of eight people were interviewed, three from each cleaning company and one from each hotel. The manager, supervisor and one cleaning staff member of each cleaning company and the manager of each hotel took part in this thesis. The questions for the interviews can be found in Appendices 1, 2 3, and 4.

4.1 Introduction to interviewees

The service manager in SOL, is mainly responsible for all cleaning related matters for the hotels their company provides cleaning services for. The supervisor from SOL who was interviewed is responsible for the housekeeping of one hotel in Vantaa, which she supervises. The cleaning staff member from SOL, who took part in this thesis works at the same hotel in Vantaa as the supervisor. The manager of N-Clean is responsible for overlooking the housekeeping department for hotels their company provides services for. The supervisor who was interviewed works for N-Clean Oy is responsible for the housekeeping in a hotel in Helsinki. The cleaning staff member who was interviewed also works in the same hotel as the supervisor. Two hotel managers are interviewed as well, one from Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga and one from Original Sokos Hotel Albert. The hotel manager working at Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga is responsible for the hotels operations, and the hotel manager employed at Original Sokos Hotel Albert is also responsible for the hotel operations.

4.2 Changing trends in outsourced housekeeping

Managers of SOL and N-Clean cleaning companies pointed out that the increasing demand of outsourcing housekeeping in hotels is creating a greater workload for them. They have both noticed that recently more and more hotels are outsourcing their housekeeping department to external cleaning companies. This has created a need for more workforces at the cleaning companies, resulting in an increase of vacancies at the cleaning companies. Cleaning companies in Helsinki and Vantaa are hiring more employees than before, which is creating a growth curve in the cleaning industry. SOL and N-Clean managers mentioned that due to this, both cleaning companies are expanding their businesses while there is a competition with other cleaning companies who are also trying to create a good reputation of their own in this field.

The manager at Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga mentioned a few different reasons for outsourcing their housekeeping department. First of all he explained how this is a common procedure in hotels all over Helsinki, secondly the hotel does not have a fixed personnel that needs to be managed, and lastly they do not have to manage the salary expenses of the cleaning staff members. Handing over the entire housekeeping department to an external source takes away a major responsibility from the hotel which otherwise needs constant management. The manager at Original Sokos Hotel Albert mentioned a few different reasons for outsourcing their housekeeping department. She pointed out that it is a better way to organize staff, as the cleaning companies have the expertise and focus on managing their housekeeping staff. On the other hand, if the hotels were to have internal housekeeping, the manager would have other things to manage along with the housekeeping staff. Another reason she mentioned was the fact that the cleaning companies are specialists in the field of cleaning and housekeeping, thus it makes sense to hand over a core department to someone who has the expertise in the field.

The author contacted 18 random hotels in Helsinki and Vantaa, Finland, to find out how common it is among them to outsource their housekeeping department. The author came to know that the majority of the hotels, 16 out of 18, have outsourced their housekeeping to external suppliers. Only 2 hotel chain has an in-house housekeeping department. The trend of outsourcing housekeeping in hotels would not have been becoming increasingly common if the hotels were not satisfied with the service of the external supplier, the cleaning companies. Both managers shared similar views on this matter, indicating that the hotels they provide services for are satisfied with their given services.

4.3 Hotel's perspective on outsourcing

Both hotels (Original Sokos Hotel Albert and Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga) use different cleaning companies, one is using N-Clean and the other is using SOL for their housekeeping. They were both asked whether they are satisfied with the service that they have so far received from these companies, to which they had different answers. Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga's manager explained how until recent months they were satisfied; however they are now looking for another solution. The manager did not mention how long they have been using this cleaning company. The Original Sokos Hotel Albert's manager, on the other hand, was very happy with their outsourced housekeeping department, which they have been using for the past 2 years. However, it is to be noted that this hotel used to have in-house housekeeping before and when they decided to outsource this department, the same staff they had for their in-house housekeeping was hired by the cleaning

company which now provides these services to the hotel. So the same cleaning staff used to work internally prior to the outsourcing, which was a big bonus for the hotel as the staff was well trained and accustomed to the cleaning practices and the expectations of the hotel.

The measurement of quality was questioned to both interviewees. The manager from Best Western plus Hotel Haaga explained several different methods that they use for quality measurement; check lists, random testing, client feedback and media systems. This shows that the hotel is investing time and effort into keeping their quality of housekeeping in check by using different processes. The manager at Original Sokos Hotel Albert described two methods that their hotel uses for quality control; room inspections every week and customer feedback. When asked how long the hotel uses the same cleaning company, the Original Sokos hotel Albert's manager repeated how they have been with the same company for two years and added that they are not planning to change to another service provider yet. On the other hand the other hotel manager explained that as long as the quality stays on the level it needs to be, they stay with the same cleaning company, as this is not something that can be compromised. He further added that we need to understand that cleaning is also a big part in keeping places fit and well maintained. The same question that was asked was interpreted differently by both managers, however it gave the author a good insight into the matter.

The author was greatly interested in finding out what advantages and disadvantages the hotels managers have in mind regarding outsourcing housekeeping departments. In regards to the advantages, the Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga's hotel managers had a similar answer as for the question concerning reasons for outsourcing the housekeeping department. His main points were; no fixed personnel and no fixed salaries to be managed by the hotel. The Original Sokos Hotel Albert's manager gave a few advantages for outsourcing, mainly it being cost effective, the cleaning company having the best knowledge of the field and that they have their own equipment. It can be seen that both managers had different aspects in mind when giving their opinion on the advantages of outsourcing, one highlighting the operational and managerial aspects and the other focusing on the area of expertise. In regards to the disadvantages, the manager of Original Sokos Hotel Albert was positive and believed there to be no disadvantages in outsourcing. However the manager at Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga was concerned with the varying quality of service received saying, the quality may vary if the cleaning supervisor is not up-to-it, as the service received revolves around the management of cleaning. Here the importance is placed on the management of cleaning staff in order to ensure a sustained quality of service.

4.4 Training of employees at SOL and N-Clean

SOL aims to promote their service industry in their young employees mainly. This is done by offering their young employees the chance to obtain a degree in this field through the SOL apprenticeship program. The employees are given the flexibility to work and study simultaneously.

The aim of SOL's training program is to firstly increase their staff's professional abilities, secondly meet the needs of their customers and thirdly provide their employees the opportunity to complete different degrees. SOL works in cooperation with other teaching institutions and training experts in order to provide their employees with the best possible training. The SOL's training programme includes courses which are field specific, each consisting of their own extensive courses and training programmes. In addition to this, online training is part of day-to-day training.

Managers of SOL and N-Clean explained that they provide orientation for their new staff on the first day at the company. This orientation is given by their supervisors. From their second day at work their field training begins, where the new staff members watch their supervisors and other existing coworkers perform the housekeeping tasks for a few days until they are ready to begin working on their own. In the beginning the newly hired staff is given a little longer to clean the rooms, and slowly they are expected to speed up the cleaning process as they learn. However, those with previous experience in this field often do not require any training, thus they begin working on their own right away. At the SOL cleaning company some pictures are also provided for the training of their inexperienced new staff. They believe that some people can learn better by seeing pictures compared to by only oral instructions. However the manager of N-Clean felt that it was not important to have pictures, in her opinion it all depends on how active and motivated the learner is.

The cleaning staff member at SOL mentioned that the orientation provided by SOL could have been better, by having it in smaller groups. This would give the new staff a chance to have their concerns addressed, as it is difficult for the supervisor to answer everyone's questions in bigger groups. He explained that the orientation that he was a part of felt like it was just a compulsory task the company was carrying out without having put too much thought and effort into it. He would have benefited and gained more knowledge from the orientation if it were planned and structured well.

In regards to development programs for employees, both companies offer such programs for employees who wish to develop their skills and gain more experience in this field. However, the managers pointed out that this is entirely up to the employee, to find the motivation to undertake these programs to gain more knowledge. An important factor was pointed out by the managers in regards to these programs was the fact that these cleaning companies mostly have part time workers, there are not too many workers who stay long enough to enroll for such developmental programs. For those employees who are willing to sign a long-term contract with these cleaning companies, a study program in the cleaning field is offered. They can study and work at the same time. Both cleaning companies have associations with the Amiedu, a vocational adult education center, where the employees can pursue further studies.

4.5 Cleaning and Quality control at SOL and N-Clean

Another very important issue in the cleaning industry is cleaning hygienically. Both companies' managers were very confident about using the best cleaning products, however their methods of cleaning differ slightly. The manager at SOL said that they don't change the mop until it is visibly dirty, which means it is used in multiple different rooms. She explained that this is because they use a special cleaning spray on the mop after each use, which eliminates germs effectively, thus there are less chances of microorganisms being spread from one room to another. However, the manager at N-Clean clearly stated that their cleaning staff changes mop from room to room. They don't use the same mop in two rooms, even if the mop looks clean.

When cleaning is being discussed, it is important to look into the quality of the cleaning services provided. The cleaning staff members were asked if they get enough time to clean each room, to which they replied by saying that the time they received was sufficient enough for them to finish cleaning the room and if the room is big or extra dirty they get a few extra minutes to make sure it is clean for the next guest. However, when they were asked if they are able to maintain the same level of quality throughout their day, they both responded by saying that when they begin their shifts they are able to give their 100% to their work, but are unable to maintain the same level of energy throughout their shift. By the time their shift comes to end, the level of quality of the service declines. The main reason they described for this was tiredness and exhaustion. This could possibly be due to the fact that they are not given enough break/rest times, as they explained.

For the hotels it is very important that cleaning quality standards are met every day according to the contract made with the cleaning company. The process of quality control is incomplete without a random inspection check done by the hotel's managers. During the inspection if the manager comes across any cleaning related issue which may be causing the quality standards to be compromised, it is reported to the housekeeping supervisor. Then the supervisor visits the same room, which the hotel's manager inspected, and looks for him/herself the issues that were brought up. In order to proceed with this complaint, first thing that the supervisor does is to check who cleaned the room and when it was cleaned. Then the cleaning staff member who cleaned the room is asked to come and see their mistakes. If it is the first time that the member is found to be responsible for not delivering a good quality of cleaning service, they are given a minor warning. If they repeat the same mistake again, more training sessions are arranged for that worker and final warning is given, after which if the employee does not deliver the quality of service required, they are fired. Later on supervisor and managers have meetings in which they discuss how the cleaning can be made more effective in order to avoid these kinds of mistakes (Interview, SOL).

4.6 Handling Complaints at SOL and N-Clean

Many sources claim that when housekeeping services are outsourced, after certain time limit the quality of the cleaning drops. This is often reflected in the complaints that are received by the cleaning companies from the hotels. The problem could be either with the outsourced company or the employees themselves, as the sense of accountability and responsibility of the staff on contract can be lower. The supervisors of N-Clean cleaning company explained that once the contract between the hotel and the cleaning company is made, the hotel does not interfere in the cleaning company's or its staff's matters. The hotel is well aware of the fact that the cleaning company is their outsourced client and they let them do their work. Anytime an issue arises, the hotel's manager contacts and communicates with the cleaning company's supervisor or manager. The hotel's employees are not allowed to directly speak regarding any issues or complaints to the cleaning company's staff members.

Both cleaning companies handle complaints in a similar manner. If the housekeeping staff makes any mistakes, the hotel's staff will write a notice and send it to the cleaning company. The cleaning company discusses these complaints with their staff and serious action is only taken towards the employee if these complaints recur repeatedly. The supervisors said that they cannot risk their reputation and quality control because of an employee

who does not take their work seriously. At the end of the day it is not only the cleaning company's reputation that is at risk, but also the hotel's.

4.7 Employment Criteria for Cleaning Jobs

Both managers stated that the employment criteria for hiring cleaning staff does not focus on the prospects' educational background, however they do consider any previous work experience in this field. The manager of SOL mentioned that it is often the case where the prospect with no high educational background, no previous cleaning experience, no good English or Finnish speaking skills is considered for the job. She said that these kinds of employees are "diamonds", which they hire, train and polish. She went as far as to say that these employees are a more valuable asset to the company than any other well educated and skilled employee, because the company has invested time and effort into them.

The employment criteria is not too selective of who will be accepted for the job; none or little Finnish language speaking skills and little or no experience in the field of cleaning is acceptable. This enables foreigners in Finland to opt for these jobs to be able to get a decent earning while they gain their language skills to get a better job in their own professions. It was also discovered that almost one fifth of the employees at N-Clean have a university/applied university degree (Figure 6), which would otherwise enable them to get a better job, but most commonly these are foreigners who lack the Finnish speaking skills in order to get a job in their own fields.

One of the cleaning staff member interviewed told that he was from Nepal, currently studying at a university in Helsinki to become an engineer. He mentioned that he did not have any previous cleaning experience, however out of all the jobs he applied for in different fields, he was only able to get this job at the cleaning company. On the other hand, the other cleaning staff member who worked at the hotel in Helsinki, was also from Nepal with no educational background, but a good experience in the cleaning field

4.8 Housekeeping staff demographics

All of the statistics discussed in this chapter have been provided by the cleaning companies. The employee demographics of the cleaning companies provides a better insight into the cleaning companies' environment and employee background.

4.8.1 Nationality characteristics

Both cleaning companies provided statistics for the nationality of their employees. These have been calculated in percentage and divided in two categories; employees having a Finnish nationality and employees having any other nationality than Finnish. It is to be noted that these include people who may have not been born in Finland, but have attained the nationality of Finland by fulfilling the requirements for becoming a Finnish national.

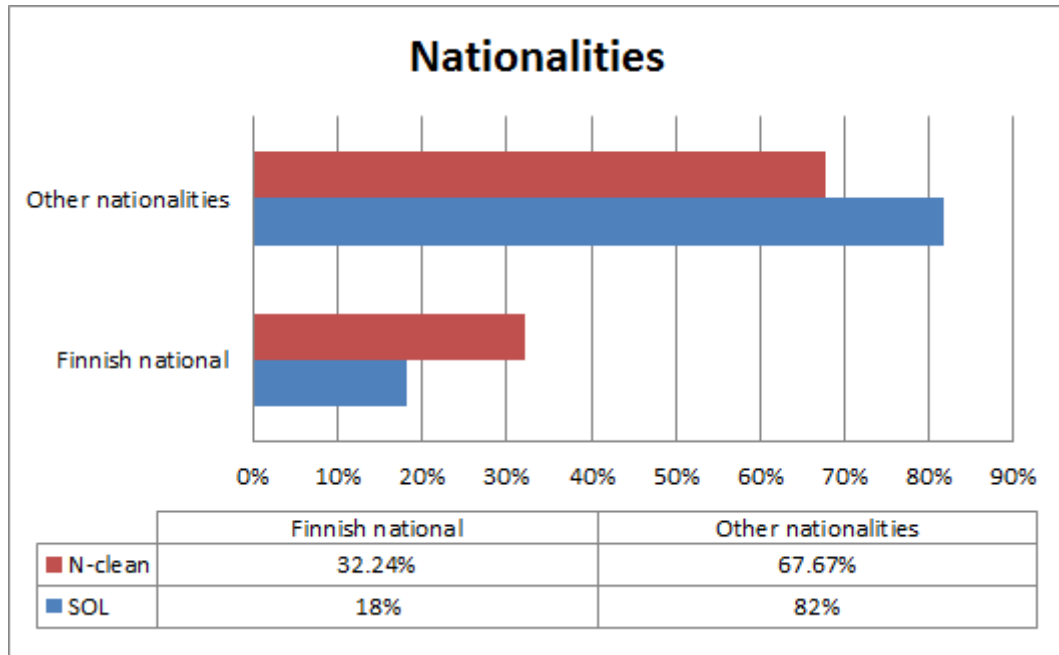


Figure 1. Nationality of the employees at N-Clean and SOL

As it can be seen in Figure 1, most of the staff members of both cleaning companies are non-Finnish citizens. When further inquired, the reason for this was mainly the fact that foreigners lacked language skills to be able to secure for themselves a better paying job, as that would often require well spoken and written Finnish language skills. Some of the foreigners were at the time of employment also acquiring further education and needed the cleaning job for paying their bills. Hence they are were most likely going to opt for better jobs once they get their higher education completed and enhanced their language skills. This sheds light on why the cleaning companies prefer to have part-time employees instead of full-time employees. It is also to be noted that N-Clean has a higher percentage of employees with a Finnish nationality, close to almost one third.

4.8.2 Gender Distribution

Both SOL and N-Clean provided statistics of their cleaning staff members. These were obtained in order to get an insight into the overall numbers of females and male workers in the cleaning department.

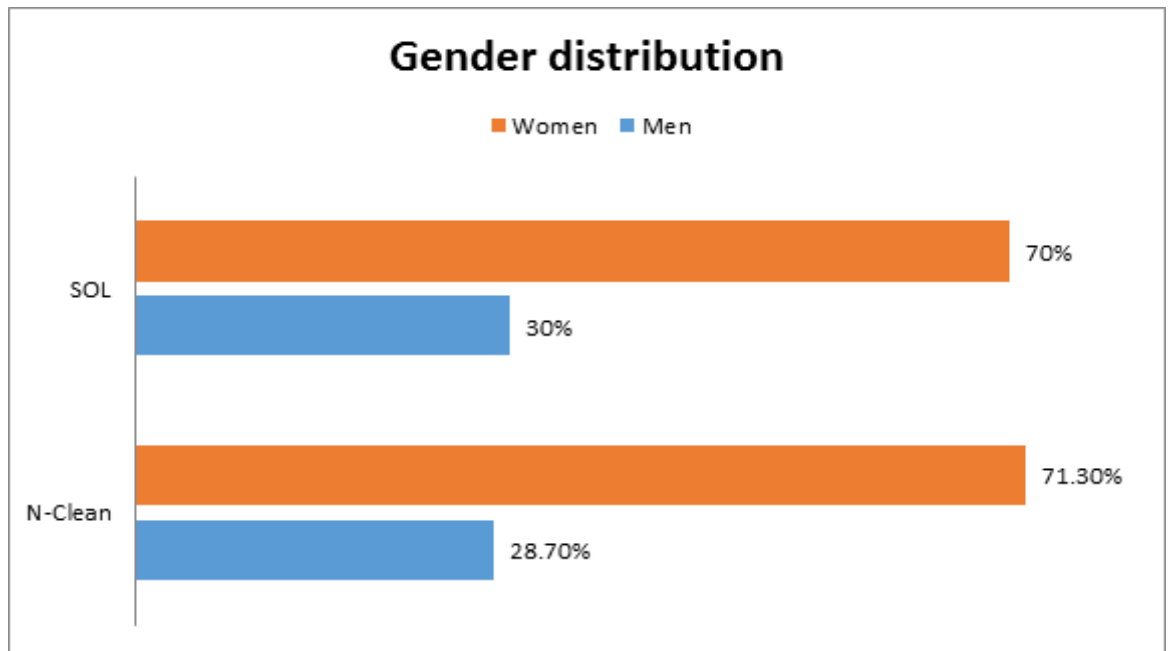


Figure 2. Gender of the employees at N-Clean and SOL

The chart clearly shows that both companies have female employees in majority, well over two-thirds. The managers of the cleaning companies also indicated that they have often seen more female workers in the cleaning field compared to male.

4.8.3 Age

The age of all the cleaning staff members of SOL and N-Clean were looked into in order to see the similarities and differences in the age groups of both companies. The manager of SOL was in favor for hiring older adults, as they normally have more experience, stay for longer periods of time with the same company and they tend to deliver a better quality of work compared to younger employees. On the other hand the manager also pointed out

that it is easier to train younger employees because they have a tendency to learn much faster compared to older adults.

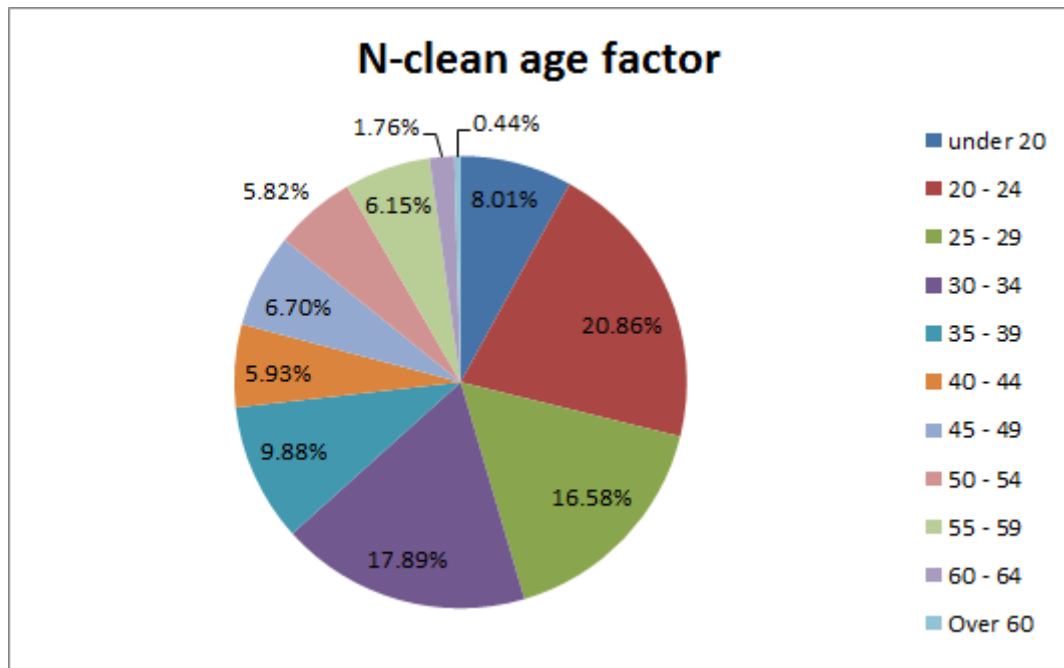


Figure 3. Age of the of the employees at N-Clean

The chart indicates that above 50% of the employees at N-Clean are below the age of 35 and nearly one third of the employees are under the age of 25. They have a very small percentage of employees above the age 45, close one fifth only.

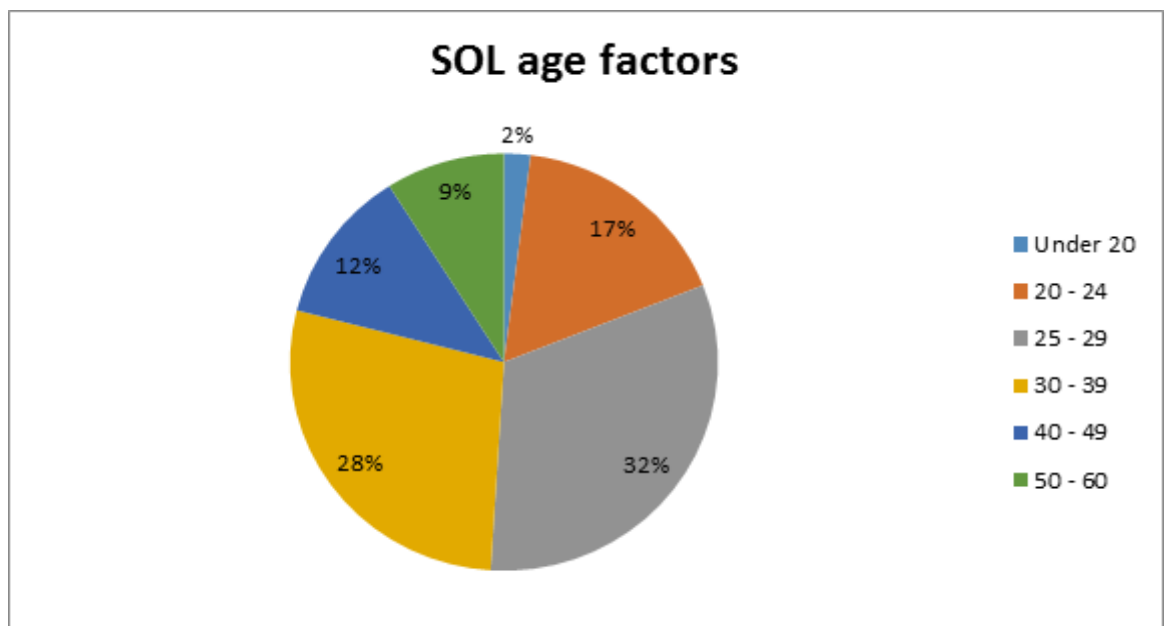


Figure 4. Age of the of the employees at SOL

The chart shows that above 50 percent of the employees at SOL are below the age of 30 and less than a quarter of the employees are age 40 or above. N-Clean has a slightly higher percentage of employees above the age of 50 compared to SOL, where N-Clean has close to 14% and SOL only has 9%. Both SOL and N-Clean have a similar percentage of employees under the age of 40, both companies close to 70%. However, N-Clean has 4 times more percentage of employees under the age of 20 compared to SOL.

Both companies have young adults as majority of their employed staff, for which there could be several reasons; housekeeping is a physically demanding job, more young adults need a part-time/short contract job, or that the cleaning company prefers younger adults. Cleaning industry is physically a very demanding field. It would be easier for young adults to carry out the housekeeping tasks compared to older adults, due to the fact that they have more energy and muscle mass to work with.

4.8.4 Working contracts

The statistics of employee working conditions were only provided by SOL. The manager of SOL mentioned that they evaluate if the employee has the potential to be hired for full time or not. This is often based on the performance and dedication of the employee. The statistics of the working conditions of SOL cleaning staff employees can found in figure 5.

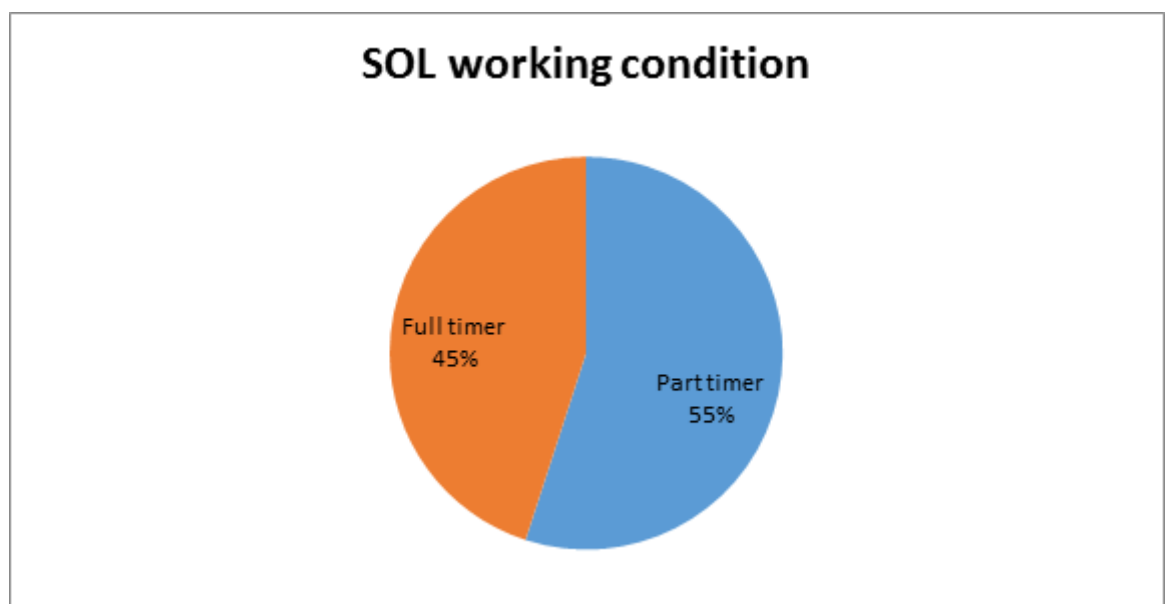


Figure 5. Working conditions of the employees at SOL

SOL has a greater number of part time employees compared to full time employees. However, the difference between the two is only of 5%. The manager of SOL also added

to this, stating that 55% of the part time worker's age ranges from 20-39 years old. Often it is the preference of the cleaning companies not to have younger adults as full time workers, due to the fact that more often than not, most of them tend to move on to other careers in life.

4.8.5 Educational background

SOL was not able to provide the author with their employees' educational background, because they did not have any statistics for it. When asked, the managers said that their employee selection is not only based on their educational background.

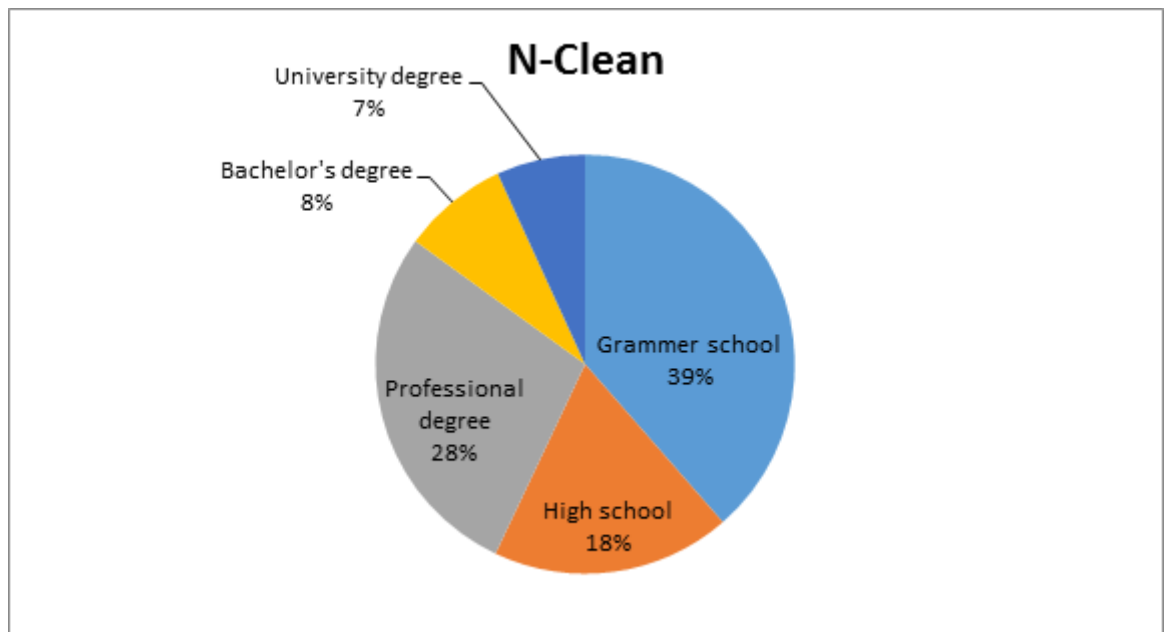


Figure 6. N-Clean cleaning staff's educational background

The chart shows that the majority, more than 50 percent, of the cleaning company's employees have received higher education, either up to high school only or pre-graduate. However, more than one third of the employees have only received basic education. According to the manager of N-Clean, it is not important for a person to be well educated in the cleaning field, but it is beneficial to have skills necessary for cleaning. As it can be seen here, eight percent of the employees carry a Bachelor's degree, yet they only end up getting a low waged cleaning job. The manager explained that most of these professional degree holders are foreigners, who are unable to get other jobs in their own fields due to a lack of good Finnish speaking and/or writing skills.

4.9 Limitation

This literature has the following limitations; 1) The author is a new to the field of research and only a beginner, thus data collection, analysis and further examination of the findings may be less thorough and conclusive than that of a more experienced researcher. 2) The cleaning company managers were not able to openly answer all the questions without having to worry about the confidentiality of their company, thus they refrained from giving out too much information to the author. 3) More interviews in total would have provided the author with a better understanding of the area being researched. 4) The cleaning staff members had little English and Finnish speaking skills, due to which they were unable to provide the interviewer with thorough and detailed answers. 5) There was a lack of literature published on outsourcing housekeeping department, as this is a fairly recent concept and more research needs to be done in this area.

5 Discussions

As outsourcing the housekeeping services in the hotel industry, along with other industries, is becoming more and more common, it creates a higher demand for different cleaning companies in the market. This in turn creates a competition among the cleaning companies. In Helsinki, all cleaning companies have different rates for their services. As a obvious matter of fact, companies who use external services are often in the lookout for the cheapest possible option, which does not always insure the best of quality in service. Often times the hotels may opt for the cheaper service, only to later find out that the quality does not meet their standards, and then they would have to use a more expensive external service. If this happens often, the cheaper service provider takes upon itself a bad reputation and then it may struggle to find future contracts.

The cleaning companies also face a lot of pressure, due to the fact that many hotels in Helsinki are chain hotels which often use the same cleaning company for their housekeeping department, thus if any one hotel belonging to the same chain ends their contract with a cleaning company, the other hotels belonging to the same chain are likely to do the same. Some companies have lowered their prices to get more clients but at a same time they are also not able to provide the promised service according to their competitor's opinion. In the beginning the quality standards are high but after some time the cleaning company starts to compromise on some aspects, such as, number of staff and time used for cleaning, which bring the quality of service down rapidly. Some cleaning companies' prices are higher but they are successful in keeping their clients, as they provide a consistency in their services. Thus, in order to stay in the market, the cleaning companies would need to strategically plan out their services, to ensure that the quality of service meets the hotel's standards as well as it being cost effective for the hotels when compared to in-house housekeeping.

5.1 Training and development program

Another aspect that was researched in this thesis was the importance of training for housekeeping staff. Any newly hired employee would require some kind of training in order to understand the specific requirements of their job in that specific company. Looking at the demographics of these two cleaning companies, they tend to hire a lot of people who do not have any previous experience in the field of cleaning or housekeeping. This makes it even more necessary for them to receive proper in-depth training on housekeeping and cleaning. Before giving the employees any kind of cleaning, it may be beneficial to

do an evaluation of the employees' skills and provide them with training accordingly. For existing employees, their work and performance should be assessed time to time, and evaluate if they require further training to better their skills.

Both companies provide in-house training to the newly hired cleaning staff member, where they are shown how the cleaning is done, using the similar equipment which they will be using in the hotels. By seeing the tasks carried out in a non-stressful setting, and getting to practice them, ensures that the employee get the time they require to fully understand their work. Manager of SOL and N-clean explained that they give proper training to their cleaning staff, ensuring that before they begin their actual housekeeping work, they know very well what is required and expected from them. The manager at SOL said that good support and cooperation between the supervisor and the cleaning staff is necessary to accomplish their daily operations. Training can help give a boost to the confidence of the trainee and can also help them to stay motivated. They can also prepare themselves for promotion through trainings, as it provides an opportunity towards success. It also reduces their stress regarding as they become more confident and comfortable in what they are doing. By receiving effective training the employees are able to provide high-quality service and for guests, who will be happy to receive the standard of service they paid for.

In addition to training for new employees, both companies provide excellent developmental opportunities for their cleaning staff. The employees who are keen to work full time are given the privilege of acquiring further studies in the field of cleaning, with the support of their employer. This gives them an opportunity to better their understanding and skills and turn and everyday job into a profession for themselves. Strategies like these offered by companies empowers their employees and provides them with the tools to gain motivation and enthusiasm towards their work. This is valuable for both the employer and the employee.

5.2 Employee Demographics and working conditions

The findings show that the majority of the cleaning staff in both companies are non-Finnish citizens. It can be concluded from the findings that the Finnish nationals are not opting for these cleaning jobs. In Stats Finland it is stated that 69.4 % of the population is educated in Finland (Statistics Finland 2013). For an educated person, with good Finnish language skills, who has invested time and money to acquire new knowledge and skills for good profession and better paying job, cleaning jobs may not seem very attractive. Cleaning jobs do not require one to have achieved higher education and are one of the least paying jobs all around the world. As almost 70% of the population in Finland is educated,

the chances of them applying for cleaning jobs would be very low, as they have the professional skills as well as good language skills to find much better paying jobs.

N-Clean and SOL reported that they have workers of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, while the cleaning staff members who are Finnish, hold only a small percentage in these companies. Nowadays the diverse and multicultural environment in workplaces poses as a challenge for the supervisors. Workers could be from different backgrounds, holding unique values and having different worldviews. This diversity can create communication difficulties between the cleaning staff, and the supervisor must be prepared to tackle this problem. As a housekeeping supervisor, a patient approach with good managing skills are required in order to manage a group of workers who may have a lower educational background and may be inexperienced in this field of work.

This brings us to the discussion of the nature of working contracts the cleaning companies mainly adapt. Short-term working contracts are very common in these companies, as many people do not see cleaning as a long-term profession for themselves and often only opt for part time work. This can be seen beneficial for both the employees and the employers. For the employer it is cost beneficial and they can choose to have them employed for as many hours the company requires. Along with this, the company most often does not give the part time workers any benefits, which saves them a lot of money when compared to the benefits and packages that are often provided to the full time employees. Part time workers also give the company flexibility, as the company does not need to give the employee too many working hours if the work is not required, which also gives flexibility to the worker. The main drawback of having part time workers is the lack of commitment, when compared to full time workers who receive a consistent income and benefits from the company, the part time workers may not feel the same type of attachment with the company, thus it would make it easier for them to leave.

5.3 Advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing

There are both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to outsourcing a hotel's housekeeping department. There are pros and cons for contracting external suppliers for any service in a hotel, which requires an evaluation done by the management of the property. Most often the main reason behind outsourcing the housekeeping department is to get a specialized service from cleaning companies, while hotel managers can focus on other core departments of the hotel.

The biggest advantage of outsourcing the housekeeping department to an external supplier is the cost effectiveness, which the cleaning company SOL and N-Clean managers and the Original Sokos Hotel Albert manager agreed to. The manager of Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga mentioned two other aspects that are also very important; having no fixed personnel and not having to manage their salary expenses. All of the aforementioned do not only require expenditure, but also time and effort. This is one big responsibility off their checklist and passed onto the service provider. Managing the cleaning staff on a daily basis and maintaining the required service quality is quite a demanding task. The contractors are also responsible to get the desired results, which requires the cleaning staff to stay at work until that is achieved.

The manager of Original Sokos Hotel Albert mentioned that it also proves to be cost efficient in terms of cleaning equipment, as it requires a lot of investment, which can otherwise be invested elsewhere if housekeeping is outsourced. Generally the cleaning companies own and take care of their cleaning utilities themselves, including linens, towels, detergent, chemicals. Once a cleaning company is hired for housekeeping, the hotel staff can focus on other aspects, which also require a lot of time and effort, and not worry about the cleaning related issues. Outsourcing in hotels is being used as a strategic initiative to improve in other areas of the hotel such as customer service and marketing.

On the other hand, there are also a number of disadvantages when the housekeeping department is hired on a contract. First and foremost, by bringing in outside company, the way things are done are changed, which can itself cause problems and the hotel management no longer has control over the housekeeping department. The hotel manager can only communicate their concerns with the cleaning staff's supervisor or manager, but cannot directly pass on any complains to the staff. The cleaning company has the right to make their own decisions of the processes and cleaning operations, without little interference from the hotels. Secondly, the hotel is handing over a core responsibility to an external source, to manage a department which has tremendous effects on their guest's satisfaction. Even if for one time the quality of cleaning goes below the level of the hotel's standard, the guests will that experience the result of it may never return to the same hotel again. Especially nowadays with the social media at the tip of everyone's finger, the guests can leave their reviews in numerous places within minutes of entering their room, which in turn will affect the opinion of future prospect guests about the hotel and its services.

Communication techniques have also changed, now housekeepers are also provided with work phones to improve connectivity and reduce response time towards some urgent matters. However, both SOL and N-Clean have workers who do not necessarily have basic Finnish or English language speaking skills, which creates a communication barrier between them and the hotel staff. How will a foreign worker with limited Finnish and limited English understand what is being said? This can make it difficult for the hotel staff to get simple messages through to them without involving the supervisor or manager. Good coordination is also required between the outsourced department and the hotel, especially during peak season, when tension between both parties is high.

5.4 Recommendations

In order to make sure that the quality of service is not being compromised, it is vital to ensure that the cleaning staff understands how housekeeping affects the overall hotel, as well as the need for microorganism elimination with thorough cleaning. Some employees may not completely comprehend how their simple task of cleaning can be the backbone of the hotel's reputation. This requires the supervisor to carry out regular inspections so that if any of the staff members are not meeting the required service, they can be given more training.

From what the author understands, more focus needs to be given on the training of housekeeping staff. It is not uncommon for the hotels to change cleaning companies every so often in Helsinki, this is something the author has come across in conversations with several hotel managers. Often times the reason has been the same; many cleaning companies provide excellent quality service initially, but soon after the quality starts to decrease, which is harmful to the hotel's reputation. Individual assessment and appropriate training would be one solution in order to solve this problem. Secondly, cleaning companies often times offer low price service to the hotels, which in turn means lower wages and smaller number of staff members attempting to get the job done while effecting the quality. The cleaning companies should not sacrifice on the quality of service provided in order to get contracts from hotels; rather provide the best possible quality, which would ultimately lead to a better reputation for the cleaning company as well.

Another suggestion for the cleaning companies would be to offer more full time positions, as full time workers tend to be more satisfied with their occupation, by receiving continuous paychecks and multiple benefits. When an employee is satisfied and confident with

their job, they are more likely to put more effort into their work. Recognition for one's work also keeps one motivated enough to give their best performance in their work, therefore more bonuses and awards can be planned out for the employees.

5.5 Need for further studies

Further research needs to be carried out to find out best suitable training methods for housekeeping staff, which would ensure the quality standards of the all kinds of hotels will be met. As a result there would be less complaints to handle for the cleaning company as well as hotel managers. Secondly further research can be done to look more into the work contracts of the cleaning company employees, to find out whether part-time or full-time is more beneficial for all parties in the long run.

6 Conclusions

In the findings of this qualitative research, it was discovered that the hotels in Helsinki are most commonly using outsourced services for their housekeeping department. This is resulting in an increase of cleaning staff employees needed in various major cleaning companies. The cleaning companies are investing more time in the training programs for their new and existing employees. They are also becoming more aware of their professionalism in this field and are not only providing training sessions but also educational programs, so that their staff is well equipped and is up to date with the best cleaning practices. There are advantages and disadvantages of subcontracting housekeeping department. The biggest advantage by outsourcing housekeeping is that it gives the hotel's the opportunity to concentrate on their core business and it is also cost efficient. In today's hospitality industry it is very difficult to get back your guests. There may be less disadvantages comparatively, but they definitely need to be considered; variance in quality of service, little control over the department by the hotel and communication barriers.

For cleaning companies, as an outsource service provider it is very important to train their housekeeping department to secure their own and the hotel's reputation. More emphasis needs to be put on training the staff if the employees being hired do not have any previous experience, little education and weak Finnish or English language speaking skills. If the housekeeping staff is confident in their work, they will do the work more efficiently and effectively, rather than having doubts about what to do and how to do, as this lack of confidence and knowledge has effects on both the cleaning company's and the hotel's reputation.

When it comes to taking care of daily housekeeping operations in hotels, cleaning companies should be very selective about the supervisors. It is well worth the time and effort to find and hire someone for this position who has the knowledge and skills to take care of this department. It is the supervisor's responsibility that their staff's performance and quality level is up to hotel's requirements. It requires a skilled supervisor to keep their staff motivated during their shifts, in order to accomplish daily targets effectively. The task of the cleaning personnel may not seem of great importance at the first, but when we understand the importance of cleanliness and it's effect on the experience of the guests, we begin to realise the value of this simple but rich task.

6.1 Reflection

During the thesis the author learned a lot about the process of performing a qualitative research and interviewing. The also author came to understand the challenges included in contacting companies for this research work. At the beginning the author was unsure about how much effort would be required to be able to get in contact with cleaning company's and hotel's managers. It was easier to reach the hotel's supervisor as well as the cleaning staff members. In the beginning it was overwhelming but slowly the concept of the thesis became more clear. The author learned how to be selective when gathering the sources, choose the hotels and cleaning companies and include the right personnel to be interviewed for this thesis.

It was surprising for author to come to know that there was not enough theory available in the databases and libraries regarding housekeeping, especially that which would be focused on housekeeping in Finland. It was indeed a difficult task to find much sources regarding housekeeping in hotels. The author came across some sources on the internet which may have been useful but they were often not reliable, thus they were not selected.

The author has developed her skills in performing data searches, formulating relevant research questions and reporting findings. However, there is room for improvement in terms of creating better interview questions and conducting interviews. Conducting some of the interviews was challenging, especially with the language barrier with the cleaning staff. However, the author learned to formulate necessary follow up questions during the process of the interviews.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Cleaning company's manager interview questions

1. What is the process to reach a hotel for housekeeping?
2. What is your working environment in hotels like as an outsourced service provider?
3. What is your employee selection based on?
4. What kind of training programme do you have?
5. Is your company multicultural?
6. How are complaints handled?
7. How do you measure quality?
8. What kind of feedback do you receive?
9. Who do you see as a competitor in the cleaning field?
10. How do you see cleaning industry in the future?
11. What future plans do you have for your company?

Appendix 2. Cleaning company's supervisors interview questions

1. What do you think of N-Clean's/SOL training programme?
2. How important is hygiene for your company?
3. How do you handle complaints?
4. How do you maintain quality control?
5. How do you see yourself and your staff as an outsourced service provider?

Appendix 3. Interview questions for the housekeeping staff

1. What are your qualifications?
2. Could you explain how you would describe cleaning hygienically?
3. How important is for you to deliver the quality service?
4. What is your opinion about N-Clean's/SOL's training programme?
5. Does the current room cleaning time allows you to main the service quality from the 1st room to last room?

Appendix 4. Interview questions for the hotel managers

- 1 Why did you decide to outsource the housekeeping department?
- 2 Are you satisfied with the service received?
- 3 How do you measure quality?
- 4 What are the advantages of outsourcing housekeeping?
- 5 What are the disadvantages of outsourcing housekeeping department?
- 6 How long do you stay with a same cleaning company in average? Why do you change?